

THIS MONTH

Now that most broadband connections have uncapped downloads, you can listen to internet radio stations without worrying about using up your monthly data allocation. But if you're listening using a PC, you are limited by its location. With Freecom's MusicPal (reviewed on page 51), you can listen anywhere in your wireless router's range. Best of all, it's the cheapest internet radio we've seen.

We also have the new Slingbox Pro, which lets you stream TV around your house, or across the internet so you can watch it wherever you are in the world. Read our review on page 47.

Another clever idea is Fon's La Fonera+ (reviewed on page 52). This is an access point that lets you share your broadband connection with other La Fonera+ users, but also means that you can use theirs when you're travelling around the world.

If you want a portable hard disk so you can take your files everywhere with you, read our review of Buffalo's MiniStation on page 54. Unlike most portable hard disks, it's fast at transferring files thanks to Buffalo's TurboUSB mode.

Jim Martin
Reviews Editor

jim@computershopper.co.uk



CYBERPOWER Gamer Infinity XT Ultimate DDR3

★★★★★

£1,499 inc VAT

From www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

Processors often get all the attention, but other components of your PC, such as memory, can also significantly affect your computer's performance. CyberPower's Gamer Infinity XT Ultimate DDR3 is the first PC we've seen to use DDR3 memory, the speedier successor to the DDR2 RAM used in most PCs. The Ultimate is certainly one of the fastest PCs we've seen, but this performance comes at a high price.

The Ultimate's 2GB of DDR3 memory is accompanied by a Core 2 Duo E6750 processor, which is overclocked to 3.2GHz. Unsurprisingly, the Ultimate's managed excellent scores in our Windows performance tests. It did particularly well in our video-encoding test, with a score of 350. Only computers with quad-core processors are faster. The Ultimate will be able to handle demanding computing tasks for some time to come.

Gamers will also be pleased by the Ultimate's performance. The Ultimate is the first PC we've seen equipped with the 1GB version of ATI's Radeon HD2900XT graphics card. It managed impressively smooth frame rates in both our Call of Duty 2 and Prey tests, but currently provides little speed boost over the cheaper 512MB version of the card.

Since the Ultimate supports CrossFire, you could add another ATI graphics card to boost 3D performance even further. Unfortunately, a double-slot card, such as another HD2900XT, won't fit unless you remove the Creative X-Fi sound card. This is a shame, as the X-Fi provides more realistic sound effects in games that support EAX processing, such as Doom 3. The included Creative 5.1 speakers are good enough for games and movies, but music fans will want

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★★★★★		★★★★		★★★		★★★★★					
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Archos 605 WiFi		Dell 1800MP									
★★★★		★★★★★									
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★★★★		★★★★★									
Nokia E90		Hannspree Hanns Boston									
★★★★		★★★★★									
Palm Treo 500v		Hitachi Illumina PJ-TX300									
★★★★★		★★★★★									
TomTom Go 720		Iiyama ProLite X486S-B1									
★★★★★		★★★★★									
		LG 37LC55									
		★★★★★									
		Toshiba Regza 32C3030									
		★★★★★									



a better-quality set, as the Inspire T6100 set sounds muffled and woolly.

The 22in ViewSonic VX2235M monitor has an anti-glare instead of a glossy finish. This reduces distracting reflections from sources such as sunlight and overhead lighting. Colours looked bright and evenly lit, but there was some banding in our colour transition test and some speckling in our greyscale gradient test, plus white areas looked greyish. It isn't a terrible monitor, but we'd expect better for this price.

Despite all the advanced technology inside its large and imposing case, the Ultimate is surprisingly quiet. It isn't the quietest we've tested, but it is unobtrusive when stowed under a desk. If the RAID 0 (striped) array of two 250GB hard disks isn't spacious enough for you, another four disks can be added via the slide-out hard disk trays.

Besides the PCI slot squeezed up against the large graphics card, there are two PCI Express x1 slots for adding expansion cards. You're unlikely to need them, as the Ultimate has wireless networking, eSATA and FireWire 400 built in.

We were impressed by the Ultimate's performance, but the peripherals are disappointing given that this is one of the most expensive PCs we've seen recently. It costs £250 more than PC Specialist's similarly specified Apollo 850GTS (*What's New, Shopper* November 2007) and £600 more than CyberPower's own Gamer Infinity Silent (*What's New, Shopper* December 2007). While neither is as fast as the Ultimate, both come close. Unless you regularly use your PC for demanding tasks, the Ultimate really isn't particularly good value.

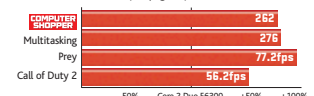
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Fast in Windows and games
- ✓ Quiet for a gaming PC
- ✗ Expensive

DESKTOP PC 3.2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo E6750, 2GB RAM, 2x 250GB hard disks, 1GB ATI Radeon HD2900XT, DVD+/-RW +/- DL, 22in widescreen LCD
DETAILS www.cyberpowersystem.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



PC SYSTEMS & NOTEBOOKS

FAQ

Q I want to install 4GB of RAM in my computer, but I've heard that Windows won't be able to recognise all of it. Is this true?

A Most computers come preinstalled with 32-bit versions of Windows, which wouldn't be able to use all 4GB of RAM. For the technical reasons behind this limitation, see <http://support.microsoft.com/kb/929605>, but suffice to say only 3GB or so would be available for use.

If you want to use 4GB or more of RAM, your computer must have a 64-bit processor – such as an Intel Core 2 Duo or an AMD Athlon 64 X2 – and a compatible motherboard, plus a 64-bit version of Windows. Refer to the documentation if you're unsure. Some software, especially peripheral drivers, needs to be upgraded to 64-bit compatible versions, but you should double-check before upgrading.

Alan Lu

PC systems and storage expert

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Audio page 50

Alba PRDAB210MP3	★★★★★
Apple iPod Touch	★★★★★
Auzentech Auzen X-Fi Prelude 7.1	★★★★★
Freecom MusicPal	★★★★★
Logitech X-230	★★★★★
Sandisk Sansa e280	★★★★★

Networks page 52

Belkin N1 Vision	★★★★★
Buffalo WBRM-G125	★★★★★
Edimax Signal Detector/USB WiFi Adaptor	★★★★
Fon La Fonera+	★★★★
LevelOne WBR-6000 N One	★★★★
Linksys WAG325N Wireless-N ADSL Gateway	★★★★★

Storage page 54

Buffalo MiniStation TurboUSB Portable Hard Drive 120GB	★★★★★
Cooler Master X Craft 360	★★★★★
Hypertec Firestorm 160GB	★★★★
LaCie d2 eSATA II 3GBits Hard Drive 500GB	★★★★★
Samsung SpinPoint T166-HD501J	★★★★★
Seagate Barracuda 7200.10 Ultra ATA/100 500-GB Hard Drive	★★★★★
Sitecom CB-040 eSATA Cardbus Card	★★★★
Western Digital Scorpio 250GB	★★★★★

Components page 56

Asus P5KC	★★★★★
Cooler Master Cosmos 1000	★★★★★
Intel Core 2 Duo E6750	★★★★★
Sapphire HD 2600 Pro	★★★★
Sapphire X1950 Pro	★★★★★

Software & Games page 58

Acronis True Image 10 Home	★★★★★
Adobe Creative Suite 3: Design Premium	★★★★★
Adobe Photoshop Elements 6	★★★★★
Adobe Photoshop Lightroom 1.0	★★★★★
Avanquest Parallels Desktop 3.0 for Mac	★★★★★
BioShock	★★★★★
Colin McRae: DiRT	★★★★★
Company of Heroes (DX10)	★★★★★
Company of Heroes: Opposing Fronts	★★★★★
Enemy Territory: Quake Wars	★★★★
Lord of the Rings: Shadows of Angmar	★★★★★
Mr Site Takeaway Website	★★★★★
OpenOffice OpenOffice.org 2.1	★★★★★
Race 07: The Official WTCC Game	★★★★★
Roxio Easy Media Creator 10	★★★★★
Sony Vegas Pro 8	★★★★★
Steganos AntiVirus 2007	★★★★★
Supreme Commander	★★★★★
Two Worlds	★★★★
VMware Fusion	★★★★★
Worldweaver DX Studio 2.1	★★★★★

BYTE SIZE

AKASA Gemini

★★★★

£19 inc VAT
From www.scan.co.uk



We've reviewed several notebook coolers. Are they a necessary accessory or a waste of cash? The answer depends on your particular notebook, and how hot or noisy it is.

Some laptops use desktop PC processors rather than their mobile equivalents, so they produce more heat. Other notebooks, such as ultra-portables, have little room for fans and heatsinks, so tend to be fairly hot, while others aren't as efficient at cooling as better-designed models.

The Akasa Gemini AK-NBC-03WH is made from lightweight plastic and comes in black or white. Two 70mm fans are powered by a USB port on your notebook. Notebooks with up to 15.4in screens will fit in it, and you can expect temperatures to drop by 9°C when under full load. However, the Gemini is not as efficient as the NotePal, below.

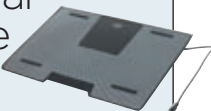
Jim Martin

DETAILS www.akasa.co.uk

COOLER MASTER NotePal Infinite

★★★★

£17 inc VAT
From www.expansys.com



Coolers such as the Akasa Gemini and Cooler Master NotePal Infinite are necessary only if you have a hot or noisy notebook and want it to run quieter and cooler.

Cooler Master's NotePal Infinite is a similar size to the Akasa, but has a single 90mm fan powered by a USB port. You can choose between quiet operation, maximum cooling, or a balance between the two. The NotePal cooled our notebook by 7°C on the slowest fan setting and 10°C on the fastest setting.

Given that you can adjust the fan speed, and it costs £2 less than the Gemini, the NotePal is marginally the better choice.

Jim Martin

DETAILS www.cooler-master.com

APPLE 2.0GHz Mac mini

★★★★★

£499 inc VAT
From www.apple.com/uk



Apple's compact Mac mini started a trend for lunchbox-sized computers when it was first launched. Now, the ageing Core Duo processor has been replaced by a faster Core 2 Duo. The mini is small enough to fit inside a biscuit tin, and certainly looks classier than most PCs.

Even during processor-intensive tasks such as video editing, the Mac mini was virtually silent, making it one of the quietest desktop computers we've tested. It comes preinstalled with the Mac OS X operating system, but we installed Windows Vista using Apple's Boot Camp utility to run our usual performance tests.

Although it has only 1GB of RAM, the Mac mini performed surprisingly well in our Windows benchmarks. Its score of 214 in our video-encoding test and 143 in our image-editing benchmark shows that it can undertake complex tasks.

It would perform even better with more RAM, especially as the integrated Intel graphics chip shares system memory, but the compact case is tricky to open and upgrade. Instructions can be found at www.methodshop.com/gadgets/tutorials/macmini-ram.

Unsurprisingly, the Mac mini couldn't run our demanding 3D graphics tests using its integrated Intel graphics chip.

Apart from RAM, there's little room for expansion. However, you're unlikely to need to do so, as wireless networking, Gigabit Ethernet, Bluetooth, FireWire 400 and four USB2 ports are built-in. There's even an optical S/PDIF port for connecting a surround-sound amplifier. Apple has bundled its iLife 2008 suite of website, music, photo and video-editing software, which

can produce surprisingly sophisticated results. No productivity software is included, apart from demos of Microsoft Office 2004 and Apple's iWork 2008, which is an odd omission.

A remote control is included for browsing your media collection using Front Row, which resembles Vista's Media Center. Unlike some Windows Media Center PCs, the infrared receiver is built into the Mac mini's case instead of being a separate receiver occupying a USB port.

The mini's size makes it an attractive option for a media centre sitting underneath your TV, but you'd have to buy a USB or FireWire TV tuner and a HDMI, S-video or composite video adaptor for the mini's DVI port to connect it to your TV. The 120GB hard disk also limits the amount of music, photos and videos you can store without adding an external USB or FireWire hard disk.

The Mac mini is a compelling choice if you don't have room for a full-sized tower PC. However, you don't get a keyboard, mouse or monitor, so you'll have to supply your own. If you already have these essential peripherals then the Mac mini is good value. But if you don't then a budget notebook, such as those reviewed in this month's *Labs* on page 78, would be a far better-value compact computer.

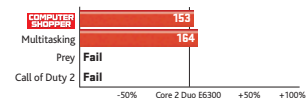
Alan Lu

SUMMARY

- ✓ Small, quiet and attractive
- ✓ Good performance
- ✗ Tricky to upgrade

DESKTOP PC 2GHz Intel Core 2 Duo
T7200, 1GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, Intel
GMA 950 graphics, DVD+/-RW +/- DL
PART CODE MB139B/A
DETAILS www.apple.com/uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



Also consider...

TOSHIBA Satellite P200-17C

★★★★★

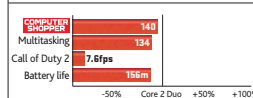
£730 inc VAT
From www.laptopsdirect.co.uk

Toshiba's Satellite P200-17C is one of the cheapest desktop replacement notebooks with a 17in screen we've seen. Its performance in Windows and games is unremarkable and it doesn't have a TV tuner, but these are not reasons to discount it.

Most people won't need better performance, and will appreciate that the keyboard is a pleasure to use, with keys that are well-spaced and responsive. The full numeric keypad means you can enter data in a spreadsheet fast. An L-shaped hinge makes the display sit lower than a normal notebook's, which is useful for working in cramped conditions. The display is great for movies, too.



DESKTOP-REPLACEMENT
NOTEBOOK Intel Core 2 Duo
T5450, 2GB RAM, 200GB hard disk,
ATI Mobility Radeon HD2400
graphics, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 17in
widescreen LCD, 3.5kg
PART CODE PSPB6E-03G02TEN
DETAILS <http://uk.computers.toshiba-europe.com>
✓ Inexpensive; good keyboard,
speakers and battery life
✗ Average performance; no TV tuner
FULL REVIEW Dec 2007



The Satellite did well in our light-use battery test, lasting a respectable two hours and 36 minutes, and the speakers sound clear and well-balanced. The Satellite P200-17C isn't perfect, but its faults can be forgiven at this price.

ADVENT K300

★★★★

£599 inc VAT

From www.pcworld.co.uk

Advent's K300 is aimed at a young audience; there's a variety of lid designs to choose from for boys and girls, including football designs for aspiring young Wayne Rooneys and skull motifs for non-football fans.

It has a 120GB hard disk, which will hold all the photos, documents and MP3s a child could possibly want to collect, plus 2GB of RAM, which makes the K300 work swiftly in Windows Vista Home Premium. It also comes with Microsoft Encarta Standard 2007 preinstalled, which is a decent software encyclopedia that will help with your children's learning.

The K300's chassis is robust, as is the 15.4in, 1,280x800 glossy widescreen, which barely flexes under pressure. The display is evenly lit, with colours appearing solidly across the display. We saw some minimal banding in our greyscale test, but it's no cause for concern. The keyboard is responsive and the keys are quite quiet when typing.

The built-in speakers sound tinny and produce little bass. This is a poor showing even compared with other notebooks. Unlike some notebook speakers, however, they can be loud without distorting. There's an S/PDIF output, which you can use to connect to external speaker systems. There are also three USB2 ports and a single FireWire port for connecting peripherals. Bluetooth and WiFi come as standard.

The K300 did particularly well in our video-encoding and multitasking benchmarks for a budget notebook. Otherwise, the results were little above average. The battery life is particularly poor, lasting only one hour and 40 minutes, and it takes



around the same time to charge fully. The onboard ATI Radeon X2300 HD graphics processor managed 9.2fps in our Call of Duty 2 test, so while it's not suitable for playing modern 3D games it should be fine for older games. If you want to connect an external display, there are D-sub and S-video outputs. It's a shame there's no DVI or HDMI output, as plenty of similarly priced notebooks, such as Medion's MD96480 (reviewed on page 31), have them.

The K300 is a reasonable notebook, but it's a little overpriced. It's comfortable to use and is powerful enough, but you should expect to pay around £100 less for a notebook with this specification. There are also plenty of notebooks in this price range with far longer battery lives. If battery life is a concern, we'd recommend PC Nextday's Zoostorm 52-4201 (see 'Also consider...', *What's New, Shopper* November 2007). It has a 160GB hard disk and two-and-a-half hours of battery life, which is reasonable for a 15.4in notebook and far longer than the K300.

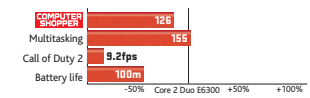
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ✓ Performs well at a range of tasks
- ✗ Poor value
- ✗ Poor battery life

NOTEBOOK PC 1.86GHz Intel Core Duo T2130, 2GB RAM, 120GB hard disk, ATI Mobility Radeon X2300 HD graphics, DVD-/RW +/-DL, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.93kg
PART CODE 721398
DETAILS www.advent.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



BYTE SIZE

SONY Micro Vault Tiny 1GB

★★★★

£9.20 inc VAT

From www.lambda-tek.com

Sony's Micro Vault Tiny looks like a memory card, but is actually an incredibly small USB2 flash drive.

It comes with Sony's Virtual Expander software preinstalled (for Windows only), which can compress your files so you can fit up to three times as much data on the drive. When you drag the files to your desktop, they are automatically uncompressed back to their original size.

The drive is also available in capacities ranging from 256MB to 4GB. It's a neat device, around a sixth of the size of a regular flash drive, and comes in a soft plastic case so it doesn't get damaged or lost. It feels fragile, though, so keep the case close at hand.

Matt Smith

DETAILS www.sony.net

CORSAIR Survivor GT 8GB

★★★★

£82 inc VAT

From www.scan.co.uk

USB flash drives are far less prone to data loss than floppy disks ever were, but they're still vulnerable to knocks and water damage. Not Corsair's Survivor, though.

The Survivor is built like a tank, and it looks fantastic. The drive screws into a metal outer casing, and rubber rings at either end make it easy to unscrew and provide extra protection against shock damage. There's a rubber o-ring at the base of the drive to keep out water when it's screwed shut.

The Survivor was faster than most USB flash drives when writing large files, managing 12.7MB/s. It's a great-looking, tough drive, but costs £30 more than Corsair's standard 8GB Voyager flash drive.

Chris Finnamore

DETAILS www.corsairmemory.com

Also consider...

SAMSUNG Q45

★★★★★

£750 inc VAT

From www.laptopsdirect.co.uk

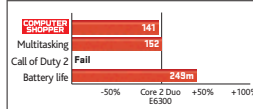
Samsung's Q45 looks very business-like thanks to its all-black colour scheme. The rigid chassis doesn't flex under stress and it weighs just 1.9kg, so you'll be able to take it everywhere.

The keyboard doesn't flex when typing and is comfortable for long periods. Inside the chassis is a 160GB hard disk for storing your files. The 12.1in display has the same 1,280x800 resolution as most 15.4in displays, but the gloss finish reflects light from bright sources easily.

The large battery lasted a lengthy four hours and nine minutes in our light-use test, but protrudes 19mm at the back. The Core 2 Duo processor and



ULTRA-PORTABLE NOTEBOOK PC
Intel Core 2 Duo T7100, 2GB RAM, 160GB hard disk, Intel GMA 950 graphics, DVD-/RW +/-DL, 12.1in widescreen LCD, 1.9kg
PART CODE NP-Q45A002/SUK
DETAILS www.samsung.com/uk
✓ Good battery life; cheap for an ultra-portable ✗ Glossy display
FULL REVIEW Nov 2007



2GB of RAM are fast enough for most tasks, but the integrated graphics chipset isn't suitable for playing 3D games.

It's an excellent choice if you want an inexpensive, smart and compact notebook for use on the move.

BYTE SIZE

VAKAADOO iVak Soft Feel Case

★★★★★
£13 inc VAT
From www.zoodex.com



Vakaadoo's iVak Soft Feel iPod Case comes in several colours for 60 and 80GB fifth-generation iPods. The iVak feels sturdy and rigid without adding much bulk to our 60GB iPod. The slim iVak has to be prised open using a credit card, but this isn't difficult.

All the controls, including the click wheel, are exposed and accessible, although the hole for the hold switch is a little small, which makes it tricky to use when your iPod is in your pocket.

The iVak Soft Feel series has a pleasingly soft, velvety texture and looks great. But unless you must have the soft texture, you can get the same case with a hard and glossy finish for £5 less.

Alan Lu

DETAILS www.vakaadoo.com

IHOME iH19

★★★★★
£60 inc VAT
From www.easyishop.co.uk



The iH19 is a portable, water-resistant speaker system. It provides great protection for your iPod (or other MP3 player), which fits snugly inside the water-resistant case. Note that the iPod connector isn't compatible with third-generation iPods or older.

The device can run on either four AA batteries or a mains adaptor. It also comes with a number of attachments that allow you to clamp it securely to your bike, pushchair or anything that has similar sized tubes.

It might be rugged, but the iH19 isn't that stylish. The unit is bulky and looks like an oversized handbag if held by the strap. There's a choice of black, white and pink to appeal to both genders.

The iH19 is clever, well designed and easy to use, but it's not good value.

Matt Stafford

DETAILS www.ihomeintl.com

ASUS F3Sa

★★★★★

£1,006 inc VAT
From www.lamda-tek.com

Considering that Asus has just launched a £211 inc VAT laptop, the F3Sa seems expensive at over £1,000. It comes with Windows Vista Ultimate, which accounts for some of the cost and makes the F3Sa suitable for both home and business use.

It isn't ideal for gamers, though; the Radeon HD 2600 graphics could manage only 18.7fps in our Call of Duty 2 test. However, disabling anti-aliasing and anisotropic filtering is all you need to do to achieve a playable frame rate.

The 15.4in widescreen is glossy and evenly lit, producing nice, solid colours across the screen. Our only complaints were minimal banding in our greyscale test and, like Medion's MD96480 on page 31, we noticed that the 1,280x800 screen is marginally lighter at the bottom of the screen than the top.

The chassis is sturdily built, and the screen barely flexes under pressure. The keyboard is responsive and doesn't flex when you're typing. However, the letters printed on the keys look oversized, making the keyboard seem crowded. The touch pad and buttons are also responsive, and a fingerprint reader sits neatly between the buttons. The internal speakers sound reasonable, but as with most notebook speakers, they lack bass. They provide plenty of volume, though.

Battery life is average at two-and-a-half hours, and it takes the same amount of time to charge. At 3kg, it's quite heavy to carry around for long periods. There are lighter 15.4in notebooks on the market if portability is a priority.

It has a single eSATA port, a mini FireWire port and three USB2 ports,



including one on the front for easy connection of flash drives. There's also an ExpressCard/54 slot and an SD media card reader. There are two monitor outputs, DVI-D and D-sub, but at this price an HDMI output would have been nice.

Inside, there's a 200GB hard disk, a speedy Core 2 Duo T7500 processor and 2GB of RAM. These enabled the F3Sa to perform well in all our benchmark tests,

and it particularly excelled in our video-encoding test, where it achieved a score of 234. However, it still can't compete with PC Nextday's £999 Zoostorm 85-6713 (reviewed in *Labs, Shopper* December 2007), which scored a whopping 276.

Although Asus has tried to cover all the bases, £1,006 is a lot to pay for a notebook that is outperformed by cheaper models (including some in this month's *Labs* on page 78). It feels very sturdy and built to last, but the performance and features don't warrant the high price.

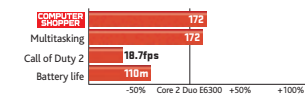
Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ✓ Very sturdy chassis
- ✓ Fast at video encoding
- ✗ Average battery life

NOTEBOOK PC 2.20GHz Intel Core Duo T7500, 2GB RAM, 200GB hard disk, ATI Mobility Radeon HD 2600 graphics, DVD-/RW, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 3kg
PART CODE F3SA-AS004G
DETAILS www.uk.asus.com

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)



Also consider...

CCL Duo4400-CSP

★★★★★

£400 inc VAT
From www.cclonline.com



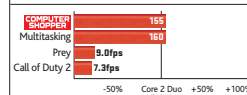
The Duo4400-CSP's case is compact, but there's plenty of room inside. The motherboard has all the slots you need to add extra memory, expansion cards or more storage. A memory card reader makes it easy to transfer digital photos to the roomy 320GB hard disk.

Unfortunately, it's not particularly quiet due to the loud processor cooler and graphics card fans.

The display can be rotated easily and it can be set at two different heights. Colours were a little oversaturated, though. A comfortable Microsoft keyboard and mouse are also included. The graphics card isn't quick enough to play modern games at high



DESKTOP PC Intel Core 2 Duo E4400, 1GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 256MB XFX Nvidia GeForce 8400GS, DVD+/RW +/-DL, 19in widescreen LCD
PART CODE DUO4400-CSP
DETAILS www.cclonline.com
✓ Fast in applications; dedicated graphics card; big hard disk
FULL REVIEW Dec 2007



detail settings, however, so you'll have to lower the resolution and detail settings. The Core 2 Duo E4400 processor is fast enough to take on most tasks, although more memory would help when editing video or running multiple applications.

The Duo4400-CSP is an impressive all-round system at this price.

MEDION MD96480

★★★★★

£600 inc VAT

From Sainsbury's 020 7695 6000



Medion's MD96480 comes with a user manual that contains all the information anyone needs to use their new computer. This is a welcome addition that we wish all manufacturers would include.

The laptop has a sleek, glossy finish that feels stylish and luxurious, although the black lid is easily marked by fingerprints. The glossy, high-quality 15.4in screen has 1,280 x 800 resolution. It flexes when you apply a lot of pressure on it, but otherwise it feels robust, as does the chassis. The screen is fairly evenly lit, being just a shade lighter at the bottom of the screen, but nothing too distracting. Our greyscale test revealed a smooth transition from black to white with very minimal banding.

The MD96480 comes with Windows Vista Home Premium, which includes Windows Media Center. Despite the affordable price, Medion has included a remote control and USB receiver, which means that you can operate Media Center from the comfort of your sofa. Although a remote might seem unnecessary when watching movies on a 15.4in display, it's very useful when you connect a larger screen using the DVI or HDMI outputs. The latter is particularly welcome at this price. There's also an S/PDIF output for connecting to external speakers. The built-in speakers are decent enough, and although the treble gets a little harsh at the highest volume, there's no distortion.

The Nvidia GeForce 8600M GS graphics card achieved only 13.8fps in our Call of Duty 2 test, which isn't fast enough for smooth gameplay.



Lowering the resolution to 1,024x768 and turning off anti-aliasing gave us a playable frame rate, but this resulted in lower-quality graphics. The Core 2 Duo T5250 processor isn't the fastest, either. It runs at only 1.50GHz and managed a score of 120 in our Windows benchmarks.

The keyboard is very responsive and gives plenty of feedback. The trackpad is also responsive, although

there is a tiny delay between moving your finger across the pad and the cursor moving on the screen. There's no internal modem, which won't be a problem for most people. If you do need one, external modems cost around £20. At two hours and 33 minutes, the MD96480's battery life is average for a 15.4in notebook.

This is a great all-round notebook at an affordable price. The 250GB hard disk is ample for all your photos, documents and MP3s. A faster processor would have been nice, but it's still excellent value.

Matt Smith

SUMMARY

- ✓ Excellent value
- ✓ Media Center remote included
- ✗ No internal modem

NOTEBOOK PC 1.50GHz Intel Core 2 Duo T5250, 2GB RAM, 250GB hard disk, Nvidia GeForce 8600M GS graphics, DVD-/RW, 15.4in widescreen LCD, 2.8kg
PART CODE MD96480
DETAILS www.medion.co.uk

PERFORMANCE (see page 66)

COMPUTER SHOPPER	120
Multitasking	127
Call of Duty 2	13.8fps
Battery life	153m
-50% Core 2 Duo E6300 +50% +100%	

BYTE SIZE

LEXAR JumpDrive Secure II Plus 4GB

★★★★

£27 inc VAT

From www.ebuyer.com

Lexar's JumpDrive Secure II Plus has a couple of extras that set it apart from normal USB flash drives. The front of the drive has an LCD storage meter, which shows the percentage of free space left on the drive. This is handy as a rough guide.

The drive also comes with encryption software, which lets you create several password-protected areas on the drive. There's also a file shredder application, which deletes files so they can't be recovered.

The drive is fairly slow at writing files, managing only 4.3MB/s for large files and 0.35MB/s for small files. Its storage meter is useful, but this makes it more expensive than other 4GB drives, most of which are faster.

Chris Finnamore

DETAILS www.lexar.com

KENSINGTON Solemate

★★★

£24 inc VAT

From www.morecomputers.com

Good posture, such as keeping your feet flat on the floor, is just as important as an ergonomic keyboard and mouse in avoiding repetitive strain injury while using your computer. This can be tricky to accomplish if you're quite short and your computer desk or chair aren't very adjustable.

A foot rest can help by providing a variable-height flat surface for your feet. Kensington's Solemate footrest can be easily tilted to different angles with some light foot pressure. Depending on the angle, the Solemate is between 3½ to five inches tall. Sadly, it's easy to change its angle inadvertently, as there's no way to lock it in place. Without this fundamental feature, the Solemate isn't very good.

Alan Lu

DETAILS uk.kensington.com

Also consider...

RL SUPPLIES Modula 4400 OC

★★★★★

£800 inc VAT

From www.rlsupplies.co.uk

If you're looking for a cheap gaming PC, RL Supplies' Modula 4400 OC could be just what you're looking for. It comes with a large 22in widescreen monitor, the perfect size for playing the latest games. It didn't do so well in our demanding image tests, however, so you'll need a better-quality monitor for tasks such as image editing.

The GeForce 8800GTS graphics card is superb and handles all today's games at high resolutions and detail settings. It's DirectX 10-compatible, too, so you'll be able to play newer games that require this technology as they become available. It achieved the



DESKTOP PC Intel Core 2 Duo E4400, 2GB RAM, 320GB hard disk, 640MB BFG Nvidia GeForce 8800GTS, DVD+/-RW +/-DL, 22in widescreen LCD
PART CODE Modula 400 OC
DETAILS www.rlsupplies.co.uk
✓ Fast in 3D, including DirectX 10; SLI motherboard ✗ Monitor could use more contrast
FULL REVIEW Sep 2007

COMPUTER SHOPPER	201
Multitasking	206
Prey	79.0fps
Call of Duty 2	59.3fps
-50% Core 2 Duo E6300 +50% +100%	

highest scores in our Prey and Call of Duty 2 benchmarks in our recent group test of gaming PCs. With a fast Core 2 Duo E4400 processor and 2GB of RAM, the Modula is great for other intensive tasks, such as video editing.

With its large monitor, great speakers, fast graphics card and sensible keyboard and mouse, the Modula 4400 OC is a great gaming PC.

BYTE SIZE

KENSINGTON SlimBlade Presenter

★★★★★

£37 inc VAT
From www.shiroi.co.uk



The SlimBlade Presenter mouse has an ultra-thin design that fits easily in your pocket and laptop bag.

The wheel moves from side to side as well as scrolling up and down, so it's ideal for navigating across spreadsheets. Kensington claims the batteries last for six months, and an indicator on the side shows how much power is left.

The mouse is lightweight and portable, and the wireless USB dongle fits neatly inside. We couldn't hold it comfortably on the desk for long periods, but while giving presentations the size was perfect. Switching between mouse and presenter mode is as simple as pressing a button on top of the mouse.

However, the focus on being a presentation tool has compromised its comfort for normal duties.

Matt Stafford

DETAILS <http://uk.kensington.com>

MICROSOFT Mobile Memory Mouse 8000

★★★★★

£45 inc VAT
From www.lambda-tek.com



It costs a little more than the average mouse, but this has a few interesting extras. First, it works wirelessly until your battery runs out, at which point you can connect it via a magnetic cable to the USB dongle, making it a wired mouse. Second, the dongle is also a 1GB flash drive.

The mouse comes with Microsoft's Intellipoint software, so you can customise the mouse's third and fourth buttons. The flash drive/dongle seems like a gimmick, but the mouse is ergonomic and fits perfectly in the hand.

If you prefer a mouse to a touch pad and you need the storage, it's worth every penny.

Matt Smith

DETAILS www.microsoft.com

CHOOSING A... PC System

Follow the steps to find your ideal specs

PROCESSOR Intel Pentium Dual Core E2140

MEMORY 1GB

HARD DISK 250GB

STORAGE 18X DVD writer

SOUND Integrated

SPEAKERS Stereo

GRAPHICS Integrated

MONITOR 19in widescreen LCD

EXTRAS memory card reader

CONNECTORS 4x USB2, network

SOFTWARE Windows Vista Home Premium

BASICS Keyboard, mouse

Recommended minimum in grey

1 The minimum specification of PC we recommend, shown in grey above, is a good starting point when working out your ideal system. This PC would cost around £500 and is perfectly capable of running everyday office, multimedia or education software, as well as doing anything on the internet. But it's an unexciting PC. It will be able to play DVD movies, but they won't sound too impressive and modern games are a no-no.

2 The size and shape of a PC is more important than it used to be. A mini PC costs a bit more and it's less upgradable, but it will take up less desk space and look much more attractive. If you're choosing a media centre PC, make sure you get one that fits in with any other electronic equipment in your living room and that it's quiet.

3 If you are interested in games, upgrade to a decent graphics card. Budget cards based on the Radeon X1900 graphics processor will cope with this year's games, but to play next year's just as smoothly (and enjoy gorgeous graphics today), you'll want anything up to an Nvidia GeForce 8800 GTX or ATI Radeon HD2900XT.

Look for an SLI or CrossFire system if you want to use two graphics cards to get the best graphics performance. Even if you don't want SLI or CrossFire now, it may be worth getting a system that's capable of being upgraded later.

4 The processor above is powerful and it's dual core, so it will handle intensive tasks. If you're going to be doing a lot of video editing, you should consider upgrading to an even more powerful processor. Intel's Core 2 Duo range is our current top choice; as well as being more powerful, it needs less cooling so your PC should be quieter.

5 If you're not interested in games, you can definitely live with integrated or cheap graphics, but there are plenty more reasons to upgrade the memory, hard disk or processor. If you'll be using your PC for serious desktop publishing, music or photo-editing tasks, you need the same kind of processor, memory and disk space as for games. For video editing consider getting two hard disks, perhaps in a RAID array.

6 A quality sound system will enhance all manner of

PC activities. To hear the surround soundtrack of a DVD at its best, you'll need a quality 5.1 speaker system. Games can also use such a system to throw sound effects around you.

If you're not interested in games or DVDs (or you don't want to trail wires all around the room), go for a quality stereo pair with a subwoofer to boost the bass instead.

If you're interested in music or want better-quality sound, you'll need to invest in a dedicated sound card. As well as providing enhanced sound, such as Environmental Audio eXtension (EAX), which tweaks the acoustics to make sound appear to be playing in different environments, you'll get higher-quality outputs and more inputs.

7 All but the cheapest PCs now come with widescreen monitors. As well as being ideally suited for watching movies, they feel more natural for working on panoramic photos or expansive spreadsheets.

Non-widescreen 17in LCDs are inexpensive, but not very exciting and quite small. A 19in widescreen LCD is now standard and has a resolution of 1,440x900 pixels. Larger 20in and 22in LCDs are available from around £200 and have a higher resolution of 1,680x1,050. This makes them better for those who want to work with complex applications.

Decide if you want a glossy display or not. Glossy displays improve contrast and make images look brighter, but they reflect overhead lights and sunlight easily, which can be annoying.

8 The standard set of connectors can be improved with extra USB2 ports, to which most run-of-the-mill PC gadgets attach, and a FireWire port for fancy gadgets including most digital video (DV) cameras. Look for a memory card reader if you have a digital camera and make sure your camera's memory card is supported.

9 Windows Vista Home Premium is preinstalled on most new PCs. Any extra software bundled should be assessed critically. It may be that you'll never use it. But you may happen across a PC that includes software you'd otherwise have paid for, so you'll save lots of money by having it preloaded.

10 If you have money left over, consider a TV card. This lets you watch TV on your PC screen and record programmes to your hard disk, or capture analogue video from a camcorder.

